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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive program aimed at supporting public school teachers' role as scholars and engaging them as generators of new knowledge concerning at-risk students. Understanding the home culture and community life of at-risk students is a basic part of this program. These students represent a very diverse group from varying cultures, experiential backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and linguistic backgrounds. The curriculum should help these students maintain a sense of identity and personal worth and a feeling of connectedness with people like themselves as well as with those who are different. They should find a truthful representation of their cultural heritage within the curriculum. The content and process of professional development for teachers are discussed, and an urban teacher intern program is described to illustrate how an effective professional development program works. The goal of the program is to improve teachers' proficiency in using the experiences and competencies that at-risk students bring to school in ways that support and enhance learning. (JD)

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS OF "AT RISK" STUDENTS: A Comprehensive Plan

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS OF "AT RISK" STUDENTS: A Comprehensive Plan

The Purpose of Professional Development

Many of the problems faced by public school teachers are rooted in the growing discrepancy between the school curriculum (content and pedagogy) and the experiences and competencies of the youngsters taught. Traditionally, the school curriculum has been designed for the standard English speaking white middle class student from a two parent family where the mother is homemaker. These students are fast becoming a minority. The students who have been traditionally underserved by public schools are rapidly becoming the majority. These students are frequently youngsters of color who come from single parent families with a low income and do not speak standard English. Growing numbers of school age youngsters are proficient in a language other than English and may speak English as a second language or have limited English proficiency. Clearly, many of these youngsters are from cultures and experiential backgrounds different than that of their teachers. A confounding factor in this situation is that as the percentage of children of color increases in public school there is a decrease in the percentage of teachers of color in the classrooms. This intensifies the need for planned and ongoing professional development for those who teach these students.

A primary goal of professional development for teachers of

at risk students needs to be improving their proficiency in providing instruction and developing a social context for learning that incorporates and makes use of the experiences and competencies students bring to school in ways that support and enhance learning. Traditional methods of staff development or inservice teacher education intended to provide teachers with new information, skills and processes have been limited in their effectiveness for preparing teachers of at risk students. There is a need to develop alternative models for professional development that are more likely to help teachers improve their practice in this area. The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive professional development program aimed at supporting teachers' role as scholars and engaging them as active consumers and generators of new knowledge concerning at risk students. This paper will focus on the content and process of professional development and will present a brief discussion of the Urban Teacher Intern Program at California State University, Hayward. We believe this project is the beginning of a comprehensive professional development program for teachers of one group of at risk students, inner city urban youngsters.

The Content of Professional Development

Self knowledge. Locke (1988) states that, "each teacher brings to the classroom a great deal of 'cultural baggage.' This baggage may cause the teacher to take certain things for granted

and to behave in ways and manners of which he/she may not be aware. The teacher must explore his/her values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs in terms of their cultural origin" (p. 132). When teachers have not examined their own cultural origin they may have difficulty understanding the significance of culture in the classroom. The problems inherent in trying to help preservice teachers understand children of diverse cultures in education courses have been pointed out in a number of personal testimonies by university professors (see Hollins, 1990; Rothenberg, 1989; and King and Ladson-Billings, 1990). Hollins (1990) describes an assignment in which students research their surnames in order to get a better understanding of their own heritage and cultural identity. During this process students learn to better understand the importance of cultural identity for their students. I believe similar activities can help prepare inservice teachers for serious study of their students' home culture and community life.

Students' home culture and community life. Understanding the home culture and community life of at risk students should be a basic part of the content for professional development. At risk students are frequently categorized as a collective body when they really represent a very diverse group from varying cultures, experiential backgrounds, social and economic status, immigration status, and linguistic backgrounds.

The use of knowledge about the home culture and community life to improve academic performance of at risk students is made

explicit in Susan Philips' (1972) study of the schooling of Warm Springs Indian children, work done by Kathryn Au and Jana Mason (1981) with Hawaiian children and in my own analysis of Marva Collins' Westside Preparatory School for African American youngsters in Chicago (Hollins, 1982). Shirley Brice Heath's (1982) work with three "literate communities" focusing on "literacy events" illuminates the fact that cultures differ in the uses of literacy and in how children are prepared to become literate. Heath points out that literacy instruction in school is consistent with the socialization practices of white middle class parents and their children are more likely to succeed in school because of this fact. Children from communities with different socialization patterns are not as likely to succeed in schools as they presently exist. Each of these studies points to a particular cultural practice that influences the academic performance of a specific population of students.

Cummins (1986) makes the claim that "students from 'dominated' societal groups are 'empowered' or 'disabled' as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools. These interactions are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to four institutional characteristics of schools. These characteristics reflect the extent to which (1) minority students' language and culture are incorporated into the school program; (2) minority community participation is encouraged as an integral component of children's education; (3) the pedagogy

promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of students to use language actively in order to generate their own knowledge; and (4) professionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority students rather than legitimizing the location of the 'problem' in the students. For each of these dimensions of school organization the role definitions of educators can be described in terms of a continuum, with one end promoting the empowerment of students and the other contributing to the disabling of students." (p. 21).

Teachers of at risk students need to increase their knowledge of the home culture of the students in order to identify cultural perceptions and practices that can be utilized to improve academic performance and empower students. The discussion of the research studies identified here can serve as a starting point in professional development seminars.

The voices of at risk students. Listening to the voices of at risk students should be an important aspect of professional development. The importance of listening to students' voices is made explicit in studies reported by Gilmore (1985) and Fine (1989). In each of these studies the authors point out how the voices or lived experiences of the students can be used to enrich and increase the meaning of school learning. Fine describes silencing in the inner city school she studied in this way "Some conversations within schools were closed; others were dichotomized. Yet a few conversations, indeed those most relevant to inequitable social arrangements, remained

psychologized: managed as personal problems inside the offices of school psychologists or counselors. The lived experiences of all adolescents, and particularly those surviving city life in poverty, place their physical and mental well-being as well as that of their kin in constant jeopardy. And yet conversations about these very conditions of life, about alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, environmental hazards, gentrification, and poor health - to the extent that they happened at all- remained confined to individual sessions with counselors ...." (p. 165). Fine suggests that these realities can serve to enrich the school curriculum and engage students in more meaningful learning. Teachers can be encouraged to conduct research studies that allow them to attend to the voices of students and describe the implications for classroom instruction.

Rethinking the school curriculum. Professional development for teachers of at risks students needs to include redesigning the school curriculum (content and pedagogy) in ways that make use of the experiences and competencies youngsters bring to school. For example, Andrew Ortony, Terence Turner, and Nancy Larson-Shapiro (1985) point out the skill of inner city children in using and comprehending figurative language at very sophisticated levels based on their experiences with the culture specific communicative practice referred to as "sounding." This skill can be utilized to enhance reading comprehension.

Curriculum content in general should be meaningful and relevant for at risk youngsters. The curriculum should be

explicitly related to the daily lives of the students and they should understand how it relates to their future adult lives. The curriculum should help youngsters maintain a sense of identity and personal worth and a feeling of connectedness to people like themselves as well as those who are different. Youngsters should find a truthful representation of their cultural heritage within the curriculum.

Models of effective practice. Teachers need exposure to models of effective teaching for at risk students. In this instance effective teaching is defined as that which makes use of the experiences and competencies at risk youngsters bring to school to enhance and support academic performance in ways that generate uncharacteristically high outcomes. Effective teaching includes the ability to create a socially appropriate context for learning. Effective teaching can be validated through students' academic performance as demonstrated in work samples, standardized tests, criterion reference tests, or well constructed teacher tests, and students' perception of the learning environment. Those providing models of effective teaching for at risk students may be expert teachers, university professors, or members of the local community. These individuals may be observed directly or on video tape.

The Process of Professional Development

Teachers as scholars. An important part of the staff

development process is reinforcing the role of teachers as scholars. Teachers need to be active in consuming and creating new knowledge as well as sharing with and learning from their colleagues and students. This means that each teacher must have a professional development plan that includes a regular review of the literature related to the area and level of instruction in his or her classroom, engage in meaningful collaboration with colleagues on issues of mutual interest and concern, have ongoing action research intended to improve professional practice, and engage in community activities that allow for becoming better acquainted with students and the communities in which they live.

Seminars. The seminar can form the core of professional development for teachers of at risks students. Teachers can participate in seminars as active scholars in search of new knowledge and engage in generating new understandings concerning teaching at risk students. Seminars can provide opportunities for teachers to meet with colleagues from both the school and the university to discuss research findings, explore theory in practice, build theory from practice, develop collaborative research projects, and report on and hear reports of action research.

Seminars can consist of long or short term study groups. These groups may be formal or informal. A study group might be made up of a small cluster of teachers working within the same age-grade level (i.e. primary, intermediate, middle school) and university faculty members with knowledge of teaching at risk

students and who are also interested in collaborating with classroom teachers.

Incentives can be used to encourage teachers to participate in seminars. Examples of incentives might include university credit, inservice credit, financial compensation for the time involved, release time during the school year, and providing study or research grants.

Observations. Teachers need time and opportunities to observe models of effective instruction for at risk students. This could mean providing release time or rearranging the school year to accommodate such activities. The amount of time allocated to classroom observation must be sufficient to allow teachers to develop and test hypotheses concerning the processes and interactions in the classroom. An effective teacher should be observed long enough for the observer to begin to predict his or her actions and responses. This could require making several observations in sequence or at different intervals depending on the nature of the phenomenon being observed.

Some teachers will need guidance in what and how to observe and on determining the meaning of what has been seen. Teachers may be at different levels in the development of teaching competence which might influence what will be seen in an observation. Berliner (1988) draws upon the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) to present five stages in the development of teacher expertise: the novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient teacher, and expert teacher. At each of

these stages, according to Berliner, teachers interpret classroom phenomena differently based on levels of experience and expertise. A competent facilitator might be helpful to teachers in the early stages of developing professional competence.

The purpose for having teachers conduct observations of an expert teacher is threefold; 1) to provide a non-threatening situation for analyzing and discussing classroom instruction with colleagues and/or an expert teacher; 2) to provide opportunities for reflecting on the context, content and process of their own instruction in contrast to the practices of an expert teacher in a similar situation; and 3) to identify practices that might improve their own effectiveness. In some instances teachers are intimidated by the thought of being video taped in their own classrooms or they may lack the confidence necessary to expose their own practices to colleagues for constructive feedback. These teachers might benefit from engaging in small group observations and discussion of an expert teacher's instruction. In this situation teachers may become more comfortable discussing their own instruction and seeking advice from colleagues. Reluctant teachers may gain the confidence necessary to try new strategies and solicit feedback from their peers.

Where expert teachers are not readily available, video tapes can be used for observations. Video tapes provide a great deal of flexibility in scheduling, reviewing, and controlling action for discussion and analysis in small groups and by individual teachers. Using video tapes allows for immediate comparisons

between different approaches and teaching strategies. When teachers have had sufficient experience in observing and discussing video tapes and/or expert teachers for at risk students they may be ready to begin working together as partners observing in each others classrooms and providing constructive feedback to improve instructional practices. For some teachers this is a delicate step requiring much reassurance that these activities are not evaluative and their mistakes will not be judged negatively.

In this instance observation is equivalent to modeling and practice. The expert teacher models effective instruction. Other teachers observe and analyze in an attempt to understand what the expert does, how it is done, whether it applies to their situations, and, where applicable, tries to internalize enough of it for replication. The observer returns to his or her classroom and tries to practice what has been seen. This is a good point at which to involve colleagues working together to give constructive feedback.

Portfolios. Shulman (1988) states that, "In general, the ideal portfolio reflects the accomplishments of teaching. The best portfolio provides evidence of teaching through the documentation of learning - both student learning and teacher learning. It provides not only a description of what the teacher did in particular episodes and over time, but also plentiful examples of student work as that unfolded over time, with as many examples of the teacher's instruction, intervention, coaching,

modeling, encouragement, evaluations, corrections, and exhortations as are feasible" (p. 22). Shulman is referring to portfolios as a teacher assessment tool, however, they are also useful as professional development instruments.

The portfolio can be used to help teachers better understand at risk students -their competencies, skills, needs, interests, and background experiences - by collecting samples of their work over time and documenting their responses to instruction in the journal part of the portfolio. In this way the portfolio can be used as a tool for action research. Teachers can learn to relate student characteristics and behaviors to instruction and the social context for learning in ways that support and enhance academic performance. For example, an intern participating in my seminar and using the portfolio made this note in her journal after observing a master teacher at work - "The children love to perform. Ms. Larry [the master teacher] makes the most of it. You can actually see these kids learning." This intern is using the portfolio as a learning tool and for reflecting on what she is observing in student behavior and an expert teacher's use of that behavior to enhance instruction.

Samples of students' work can be collected to reveal patterns of individual and group performance. For example, the interns in my seminar made a baseline audio tape recording of their students' oral reading at the beginning of the school year. Subsequent tape recordings were made at four to six week intervals to monitor progress in oral reading fluency and

patterns of difficulty. The interns were given a specific reading strategy to test if they chose. Two interns chose to try the suggested strategy. The tape recordings helped them determine the rate of progress their students made using the new strategy as compared to the old. The other interns made different adjustments in their reading instruction and the rate of progress of their students was also documented using the audio tape recordings. Discussions during the seminar and reference to their portfolios helped the interns better understand the students with whom they worked.

The Beginning of a Comprehensive Professional Development Program for Urban Inner City Teachers

During the 1989-90 academic year a new program designed to prepare teachers for urban schools was implemented in the Department of Teacher Education at California State University, Hayward. We believe this project is the beginning of a comprehensive professional development program for preservice and inservice teachers of inner city urban youngsters. Our program already contains most aspects of the content and process of professional development described in this paper. A brief description of our project is included here to highlight the use of the seminar and portfolios to facilitate the development of competence in teaching inner city urban youngsters.

Students are selected for participation in what we call the Urban Teacher Intern Program on the basis of interest and

background experiences. The program is intense. The interns begin supervised teaching immediately and are supported by a master teacher, university supervisor, and regular seminars for reflecting and collaborating with peers and a university facilitator. Additionally, an intern substitutes for a regular teacher during the daily preparation period. This allows the intern to get limited experience in working independently before taking charge of a class for the entire day.

Students complete their internship at Brookfield Elementary School in the Oakland Unified School District. Brookfield is part of the Professional Development School Project* in which classroom teachers, the school administration, and university professors are partners in planning school curriculum and providing professional development for preservice and inservice teachers.

The professional collaboration between university faculty and school personnel is especially enriched by the different experiences each participant brings to the project. Some of the input I provide for this project, that specifically related to the use of portfolios, is based on my experience with Lee Shulman, Linda Vavrus, and Sharon Nelson Barber at the Teacher Assessment Project at Stanford University. For two years I was a consultant to the project and served as an examiner and evaluator at the six-day Literacy Assessment Center field test in the summer of 1989. This experience has been especially helpful to me in thinking through the design of a professional development

program for preservice and inservice teachers.

An important part of the Urban Teacher Intern Program is the use of the seminar and portfolios. The interns meet twice monthly for a two hour seminar facilitated by a university professor with expertise in inner city urban teaching. In the seminar the interns are encouraged to discuss their experiences in the classroom -concerns, problems, successes- and to share the insights they have gained relative to teaching inner city urban children. During the seminar the interns are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and those of their peers to formulate hypotheses for testing during the next two week period.

The interns develop portfolios consisting of lesson plans, samples of students' work including a baseline audio tape recording of students' oral reading; samples or lists of materials used; a journal containing reflections on students' responses to instruction, thoughts on ways to improve instruction or the social context of the classroom, and their own reasoned explanations for what is happening in the classroom. The interns are encouraged to identify and document lessons they learn about teaching inner city urban children during their daily experiences.

The following are examples of lessons the interns learned individually and documented in their journals.

"What a great response - we mapped out the story structure of 'Old Blue.' The kids seemed to really respond to having

their words and thoughts put on the board. I also walked around a lot - that keeps their attention up, too."

"Lesson was well organized and flowed well. All students were engaged - especially when I pulled children up to be part of a set, to illustrate how sets and fractions are related."

"For my Language Arts class, I'm having the class write pen pal letters. When I first decided to do this I planned to write a form letter on the board and have the class copy the letter and add a sentence or two of their own. To my surprise, before I could finish telling the class about the letter they wanted to get started. It was great! Why did it work? I had a great introduction! I started relating the lesson to the class - 'Have you ever gotten a letter? Sent a letter?' I saw kids who could hardly read and usually refused to do any kind of writing project, using dictionaries and asking questions so they could write a great letter."

"I keep trying to draw on interests of students. I'm not sure who feels better about the lesson, me or the students, when it goes right. Today I got them excited and they did more advanced work than they ever did in the past - they were challenged and it worked great - they were learning and

I could actually see it happening."

At the final seminar the interns were asked: What have we learned about teaching urban children? Here are some of their responses:

1. "Connecting real life and school life is important."
2. "Integrating art and science into the other content areas makes learning more interesting and meaningful for the children."
3. "The children seem to learn better when they get charged up - have fun with the lessons. They need variety. The teacher has to put life into the presentation."
4. "There are a wide range of abilities in the classroom which requires planning more than one lesson to compensate and have something for everyone in class."
5. "Make expectations clear at the beginning of the year- for everything including extracurricular activities and field trips."
6. "Some students have more problems than appear in the classroom - they carry their own baggage. Some have low skills, home problems, or drugs."
7. "Working with students having external problems makes it more important to give material at which they can succeed. Creating successful experiences for them helps improve their self image. This is true even in

kindergarten."

8. "Ownership is a big part of it - children are more interested in the work when they create their own books- group books help - and read each other's creations."
9. "Group stroking is important - using 'we.'"
10. "Flexibility. Recognizing that different kids learn differently."
11. "These kids are very forgiving. They will do special things for you to show appreciation."
12. "The teacher is a really important person in the kids lives."
13. "The family is a phenomenal resource. Becoming aware of students' outside lives is very important."

These interns are novices who, according to Berliner (1988), are just beginning to make sense of the classroom and usually lack the insight of more experienced and competent teachers. We recognize that not all of the interns' utterances represent profound insights; however, we believe their statements show significant progress towards becoming proficient teachers for inner city urban youngsters. They have developed positive attitudes towards the students, are scholars of their own practice, and are developing the potential to generate new knowledge. However, at this point they are merely excellent consumers.

In summary, I have outlined what I believe to be a comprehensive professional development program for teachers of at risk students. A primary goal of this program is to improve teachers' proficiency in using the experiences and competencies that at risk students bring to school in ways that support and enhance learning. The content of professional development for these teachers should include self knowledge, information about students' home culture and community life, developing sensitivity to the voices of students, rethinking the school curriculum, and exposure to models of effective practice. The process of professional development for teachers of at risk students should support the role of teachers as scholars, provide time and opportunities for teachers to observe effective teaching for at risk students, and encourage teachers to use portfolios as a tool to increase their professional competence. The brief description of the Urban Teacher Intern Program at California State University, Hayward has been presented as the beginning of a comprehensive professional development program for urban inner city teachers.

In conclusion, if we are to expect teachers to improve their practice through professional development, we must work to provide comprehensive programs that address their needs in very direct and systematic ways. I believe the professional development program presented in this paper is a beginning.

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